

LUCILLE LOVE, The Girl of Mystery

A Soul Thrilling Story of Love, Devotion, Danger and Intrigue

By the "MASTER PEN"

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SYNOPSIS OF THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS.

While students together at West Point, and in love with the same girl, Sumpter Love proteges Hugo Loubeque a thief, and Loubeque is dishonorably discharged. Love wins the girl. The enemy thus begun finds outlet in later years at Manila, when a butler thief in the employ of Loubeque, now an international spy, steals valuable papers from the Government safe of General Love. Loubeque sails with them on the steamship Empress and General Love accuses Lieut. Gibson, his aide and the sweetheart of his daughter Lucille, of the crime. Loubeque sends a wireless message cleverly insinuating that General Love had sold the papers to a foreign power. To save the honor of the man she loved and to erase the stigma from her father's name, Lucille prevails upon Harley, a Government aviator, to take her out to the ship, in his aeroplane. To foil Lucille, Loubeque destroys the wireless apparatus on the Empress and is hurt in the resulting explosion. In her search for the papers, Lucille becomes his nurse, and when the ship takes fire, rescues them. The vessel is burned to the water's edge and Lucille drifts to a strange island on the shore of a crushed lifeboat. Lucille is rescued by friendly savages. She is given an amulet for curing the Chief's daughter, and it proved potent against the machination of Hugo Loubeque, who likewise cast on the island, plans to get the papers.

CHAPTER XIII.

Loubeque Watches a Tiny Flame.

HUGO LOUBEQUE sat in the hut which his native had thrown up for him, his eyes filled with a sombre light. Now and then they would shift toward the squatting, evil-faced native in the corner and the dark-skinned fellow would stir restlessly and strive to avoid that gaze, not noticing that his master's thoughts were very far away from him. There was an ominous purposefulness about the great international spy that seemed to his follower a thing loaned from something tremendously evil.

But Loubeque's thoughts were upon the girl, Lucille, who had thwarted him so many times he was only just beginning to realize that Destiny was working in her behalf, protecting her from him, urging her on to the desperate chances she had already taken, giving her courage and confidence to go even further than she had already.

Was it possible that he could fail, could be beaten by this pretty slip of a girl, no more than out of her teeth; he, who, judging nations to be no stronger than the weakest individual, had brought about the wreck of nations; he, who had worked through the civilized and uncivilized world to prepare himself for his great act of vengeance and always worked successfully, should finally deal the culminating blow against his enemy only to find this fragile Lucille more than counteracting his sturdiest efforts?

Swiftly he reviewed the succession of events which had followed the placing of the papers and orders of her father in his hands by the believing butler-accomplice. Alas! the Empress he had been justified in thinking himself clear of any possibility of failure when Lucille appeared to confront him, conquering the distance between the liner and the shore by the aeroplane which was being used at the post for army maneuvers. His destruction of the wireless outfit had reacted against himself, hurrying his flaming finger against him and rendering him helpless. And in this state, out of his helplessness, had grown a situation which made it possible for the girl, Lucille, to nurse him and eventually disclose the location of the missing papers. When the mighty liner took fire and recourse was had to the life boats, only his marvelous nerve and purposefulness had made it possible for him to find a place beside the girl, and, with his hands practically upon the papers once more, Nature had stepped in and crushed the boat against the burning vessel, bearing her from out his reach. An atom upon that world of endless water, what superior being had decreed that she be saved from death; what power had guided friendly native feet toward her and saved her from the cruel, black jungle? Was it not a strength greater than his own that looked over her—He shook his shoulders irritably, ashamed for the weakness that had made him admit of such a question rising in his brain.

Though Destiny, Fate, Circumstance—call it what he would—appeared upon her side, it could not always be wafled in her behalf. But he—he, Hugo Loubeque, had been wafled thirty-nine years, his eyes never off the man he hated and the revenge he sought. Though Nature conspired in her behalf, he, by his own indomitable will, had fought down the ocean, had discovered the girl, and was so close to the papers he only had but to reach out his hands to gain them.

But how—how was the question that perplexed and annoyed him? Times, in pondering it, he would grow so enraged that he thought of taking them from her by sheer force. But always there was her face, the face of her mother whom he had loved, still loved in memory, to rise up and enter him. No, she must be tricked into disclosure of the precious documents herself.

That she carried them upon her person he knew. The scheme he had worked out through the evil-eyed native he had picked up in the jungle and frightened into superstitious awe and implicit obedience had shown him that much. The big snake working his sinister length through the thatched roof of her hut had frightened her away a sufficiently long time for him to make such a search as permitted of no hiding place for them. The papers were upon her person, the papers and the diary of his life which he desired no less. And there was small time to spare.

Yes, he must move swiftly. He must strike now while she was taking stock of her desperate situation, while she nourished the belief that his two preceding failures would be followed by a lull, a respite. The papers were upon her person—that much he knew. His whole nature revolted at the idea of searching her for them. She, herself, must be forced to give them up and the only possible way of doing this, he knew, was to frighten her by some such immediate peril as would dwarf them before the instinctive thought of self-preservation.

Long he pondered the situation, his great body bulking in its shadow across the hut, his face stern, imperturbable, betraying none of the emotions dominating his very heart and soul, his eyes great pools of inky blackness, staring always before him, unwinking and fathomless before the concentration he had placed upon himself.

His native had brought him word of the way Lucille had saved the Chief's daughter from death and in consequence been presented with the sacred amulet of the country. He realized that the ignorant savages regarded her as something in the nature of a deity. Had it not been for that the papers would now be his. This was another thing he must take into consideration while weaving his plot. They would permit no harm to befall her so long as she remained with them.

Night had long since fallen when he stirred from his motionless position, before the sombre

light was burned from his eyes by the kindling flame of action. While no visible symbol betrayed exultation, there was a stealthy sureness to his stride that showed he was about to work, that the time for reflection was past.

The native swiftly rose at a few sharp staccato syllables of command from his master, prostrating himself humbly on the dirt floor and waiting his commands. Fear still lay heavily upon him because of his two failures and he was willing to dare anything now, risk even the profanation of the sacred amulet rather than face again the Hell-loosed flame of this man's wrath, this man he had stumbled across upon the beach and who, though helpless, had spat at him farther than his blow pipe could carry and shivered the uplifted spear as he held it uplifted in his hand, advancing with murderous design upon the man. A small,

CHAPTER XIV.

The Burned Hut Falls Loubeque.

ONE arm thrust carelessly over her head, with slightly parted lips, Lucille slept upon her bed of rushes. First, it had seemed impossible even again to sleep in this village of terror with this man of unswerving vengeful purpose dogging her footsteps, hesitating at nothing to gain the papers she had taken from him when the Empress caught fire.

And then her thoughts had wandered from the documents to the reason for her seeking them and defending them against Hugo Loubeque and even the elements themselves; her thoughts had gone irresistibly a-fluttering to her sweetheart who was accused of having stolen them.

Times there were when it seemed the hideous



Loubeque Plots With an Old Woman Savage to Decoy Lucille Love Into a Pit-fall in the Jungle.

glittering thing of metal, was the weapon of this man yet he had seen a giant lion drop dead when his master raised it and threw his barking voice of orange flame through it. It was well not to go against such a being; well not to risk the possibility of his wrath even when pitted against all the traditions of his ancestors.

Hugo Loubeque smiled grimly as he read from the humble attitude of the native in which direction his mind was working. Through fear and through greed had he gathered together his vast army of servants throughout the world and he knew none of them would be faithful should a succession of failures appear to show that he was not invincible. A giant wolf-man he ruled a pack that was ever ready to fall upon him and rend him.

The reflection caused his great jaws to red- den and the solid jaw to creep ominously forward. An added ominousness of tone was in his voice when he spoke to the native, himself moving outside the door without turning back to see whether he had been obeyed.

Swiftly he strode through the inky blackness of the jungle that hemmed them in until he came to a scarcely penetrable wall of creepers, swung like giant hammocks between the trees, twisting and writhing about themselves in hopeless confusion, all deriving sustenance from the stunted trunks to which they clung. Mops like great ropes of corded hemp they were than anything else, their thick surface covered with fuzzy hairs. It was the creeper Loubeque had noticed the native using when he wished to start the night's fire, twisting about a hard, sharp pointed stick against the unyielding surface of the creeper till the friction started flame.

He had wondered at the imperviousness of the vine against anything but fire, had marvelled at the rapidity with which the slightest spark seizing the hairy exterior would consume the entire creeper. Now, he pointed to the wall of creepers, indicating how much he wished.

But half an hour sufficed to satisfy the spy and, without more than a nod, he turned and moved swiftly back to the hut. There he superintended the splicing of the sections of creepers and binding together in such fashion they should make a rope fully one hundred feet long. The last fragment of the material was used and he stared at the giant coil speculatively. A slow smile of satisfaction brightened his face, as, at a curt word of command, the native glided noiselessly from the hut, one end of the rope in his hand.

Foot by foot, a coil at a time the pile of creeper before the international spy unfolded itself, the while he prevented any knotting. The heap upon the hut floor had almost disappeared before the constant vibrations ceased and he knew the savage had finished his part of the work. He was still smiling, grimly now, when the native returned and he commanded him to fire the end that was within the hut. Then Hugo Loubeque stepped swiftly out the opening and strode along the line of creeper-rope that would like some unbelievable monstrous serpent through the lush grass and shrubbery until he came within a few yards of Lucille's hut. He halted, screening himself from the chance observation of some prowling native by hiding in the shadow of a great tree that faced her abode.

From far away, back in the direction from which he had just come there in the blackness of the jungle tip, a strange winking star seemed suddenly to twinkle upon the ground, fade for a moment, then dance swiftly toward him. At times the flame would appear to waver, to be extinguished, but always it would reappear again, having made brave progress during the time of its apparent extinction. Hugo Loubeque suddenly stirred to animation.

Noisless as any cat despite his bulk, he moved toward the girl's hut, securing the end of the creeper and tossing it upon the thatched roof. Then, once more, he took up his position in the shadow of the adjacent tree. A stray dog prowled about the street, sniffed at him, then cringed away without a sound as though his animal instinct sensed the diabolism of the man. The jungle seemed breathing heavily, like some drunken sleeper—these were the only sounds.

The only sounds save the faint, crackling one of the flame as it fed upon itself, creeping closer, closer to the thatched roof of the hut where it might have a royal meal. Hugo Loubeque waited, flexed in every nerve and sinew of his frame for the result of his stratagem. And always the flame crept closer, coming more swiftly now, fanned by the slight breeze of the open where the huts were built.

inaction here in this savage village, with no outlook for escape, would be unbearable. In her possession were the documents which would clear the man she loved, clear him in the eyes of all men. And he would suffer so, under such a charge. Perhaps he even doubted her belief in him.

She smiled away the thought, for the woman in her would not allow her to believe that the man of her choice could ever doubt. Not for an instant had she asked for references from him. She had given her heart without reserve and, from the instant of giving it, every doubt, every possible thing that might in the past or future be brought against Lieutenant Gibson was wiped from her mind and soul as though by some soothing sponge.

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But she was suffering—That was the harassing feature of her confinement here. He was suffering and she could clear him if only—She sighed. There were so many little "if onlys" before her knowledge could be of any avail in the affair. But she must be strong, that she would be ready to reach out and seize the first tiny opportunity that came her way. She must be strong to combat this terrible man who pursued so relentlessly.

Look about her though she would she could see no further possible advantage to be derived through the friendship of the natives. If they had never before seen a white woman the chance was exceedingly slim of anyone's coming to her assistance while she was among them. They had not even a tradition of seeing human beings of her color before.

The only thing to do, since no opportunity for reaching Manila lay here, was to turn in some other direction. Thoughts of the hideous jungle with its yellow fire-balls of eyes, its myriad sounds of menace meant nothing to her. She had given herself without reserve to the clearing of her sweetheart from the charge of having betrayed his country's honor and assuredly there was a Supreme Being who would not permit such a fidelity to fail.

With one comforting thought, an unreasonable solace which often seems so much more logical than all man's direct line of vision upon a situation, she fell asleep, the dark shadow of Hugo Loubeque very far away as, with maidenly confidence she consigned herself and her purpose to one above him in power.

Some premonition of evil awakened her, caused her to start bolt upright upon the rushes, her every sense alert, her ears fairly peaked with the tenseness of her listening. No sound came to her save the mournful wail of a dog, afar off. She lay back once more, tingling still with the psychic sense that told her not to slumber.

Her heart was throbbing against its cage as though it would burst through, while little ants nests of nerves gathered at the back of her neck, inevitable warnings of danger. Her first thought was for the little sack in which she carried the stolen papers and orders as well as the photograph of her mother and the diary which Hugo Loubeque had secreted in the oiled belt. Hurdled she clutched the bag, slipping to the floor and listening.

This time a rustling, rushing sound came from directly above her. So swift it was that she had scarcely time to gather her senses together before a leering roof of yellowish flame glowered at her from the place where the thatched roof had been. For the fraction of a second she could not stir before the awful menace. Her feet seemed glued to the dirt floor while every nerve and muscle of her body urged her through the opening. Then, as a long tongue of flame reached out toward the wall and embraced it, feeding there a second before another flame joined it and, in seeming quarrel, reached at the same spot, her brain dominated the situation.

With a wild shriek for assistance she darted toward the opening, feeling the hot breath of the flames nigh shriveling her as she left it behind. Again and again she shrieked, more as an outlet for her relief from the menace than for any other reason. From every hut poured the natives, stopping to stare about them for a second before darting toward the hut, which had developed into a cone-like burst of flame, roaring menacingly.

Lucille was unconscious of everything for a moment save that she had escaped the flames. Then something caused her to turn. From be-

hind a great tree she saw the figure of a man moving swiftly toward her. He made no sound as he approached, neither could she see his face for the background of thick shadow behind him. But there was an ominousness of purpose about his very movement, about the long, gliding shadow of him that told her instinctively who it was.

Simultaneously with the knowledge she became aware of the precious sack in her hand. She made as though to flee but something horrible about the advancing man deterred her, made her hesitate. She felt herself yielding finally to the inevitable. There could be no possible thwarting of such a one as Hugo Loubeque, no chance for her, a frail, weak girl to thwart this man.

Details she had glimpsed in the diary of the spy flashed across her brain like streaks of flame, vivid as the flames she had just escaped, that were even now roaring behind her, flames that undoubtedly this man had caused. Even fire and water he defied and commanded to do his will. Was there nothing his unscrupulous mind would not turn to?

With a little cry of despair she started to flee. He was almost upon her when a tall, half naked figure darted to her side. She reached out instinctively and clutched the muscular bare arm. About her on every side figures were leaping, the figures of the natives she had made her friends. Her eyes tried vainly to pierce the darkness. Voices were chattering in the gibberish of these savages. She seemed not to hear them for the song of thanksgiving which her heart was pouring forth at the realization of the narrowness of her escape from the flames, at consciousness of the protection of these simple natives. And then she hugged the sack with the papers and diary to her bosom and her lips moved silently.

Hugo Loubeque had disappeared, disappeared as silently, as mysteriously, as ominously as he had appeared. But, thwarted, the man only seemed to exercise more cunning, more desperate remedies. The proofs of her sweetheart's innocence had been close to being taken from her this time. She must not risk such a chance again. She must leave this place, must trust no longer to these people for protection, must trust herself no longer to the Fate that seemed so constantly to look after her. She must hide herself away from the master eye of the spy.

Where? It made no difference. She must hide herself—away. That was all.

CHAPTER XV.

A Chief Borrows From a Chief.

ALL through the remainder of the night Lucille clung to the child she had nursed through her illness. And now the situation between the pair was strangely reversed and she, the competent white woman became the child, racked and well nigh broken by the perversity and boldness of Hugo Loubeque's pursuit of this girl she had in her possession, while the little brown savage, recognizing with that feminine instinct common to all races and creeds that consolation, comfort and sympathy was the panacea which was most needed by this wonder woman of the fair skin, sat beside her silently all through the night, her hand clasping the trembling one, her lips silent but her eyes speaking words which would have put to shame any service the lips might have performed.

Sleep was out of the question. There could be no sleep while the mighty spy dogged her steps, knew where she was. Morning came and passed, the sun striking obliquely down upon the village before she dared even stir outside the hut, the little daughter of the chief at her side, silent and shy but always comforting by her presence.

Lucille felt a great desolation upon her, a sense of fighting a useless battle that day. What had it all amounted to, the risks, the situations she had managed to handle, so long as Hugo Loubeque was undeterred in his efforts. A mighty wave of nostalgia seized her in its grip and she felt she could willingly give over everything to be back in Manila.

Hurriedly she went back to the hut, signifying to the child that she wished to be alone. Inside, she flung herself upon the pallet of rushes, giving vent to uncontrollable sobs. Her father—she could see him transacting the duties of his office like the grim old warrior he was, but with a broken heart at the absence of the girl he had been father, mother, everything to; Lieutenant Gibson—she longed so for the tender tones of his voice, the caress of his fingers as they twined about her own; the friends—the friends and the gayeties and the hops and all the little trifles dear to her woman's heart. How she missed them all! How she longed to be away from this savage village, this unclean place with never a voice lifted in her own tongue save the dreaded voice of one who would stop at nothing to wrest from her the thing which had brought her here!

She took the sack from her bosom and wept upon it. For the first time she wondered whether it had all been worth while, wondered whether the grief her madcap enterprise had caused those dear to her would not be greater than any joy at her coming safely through the ordeal with the stolen papers intact could ever be.

It was the only natural outlet for the strain under which she had been so long a time and, when she dried her tears, it was the Lucille who had urged her little mare across the parade ground to the aviator to plead with him that he land her aboard the Empress who smiled bravely out upon the world. She was ashamed for the weakness which had taken hold of her, shamed and doubly determined that she should not fail.

Only a weak girl, only the refined product of a prominent ancestry—yet, would she prove that under all the fragility was a composition which had needed but the ordeal of love denied to turn it into steel, a steel against which even such a one as Hugo Loubeque might hurl himself in vain.

She had determined to get away immediately. There was nothing to gain and everything to lose by remaining here. Primarily, she wished to find some method of getting back to civilization. The papers meant nothing to anyone save Loubeque here, and Loubeque, with his infinite resources could undoubtedly manage to get away. Secondly, Loubeque knew where she was and his futile, unscrupulous brain would find a method of gaining them. She must get away.

She was quite positive some difficulty would present itself in making an escape from the native friends who had fairly defied her from the moment of the child's recovery. But they should be easily eluded, that should be a readily surmountable difficulty in the light of what she had already accomplished.

On going into the little street she noticed the chief in earnest conference with his daughter and an old native woman whom Lucille had no recollection of seeing about the village before. Had she but known this was but another seville tool of Hugo Loubeque's what future dangers she might have been saved. Coming closer she knew that it was a stranger; moreover, from the light upon the crone's wrinkled countenance and the furious gesticulations she made toward her, she felt that she was the object of controversy. And the daughter of the old chief seemed adding her pleas to those of the old woman with effect.

Lucille stood a little apart, watching the conference as it disbanded. She had picked up

enough of the language to make out an occasional word but the gestures of the three had been unmistakable. She waited quietly while the trio approached her, feeling that in some way the problem that had been harassing her was to be answered without further worry on her part.

She smiled at the chief's efforts to make her understand what he desired of her, smiled and shook her head as the withered old woman made an equally unsuccessful attempt. But the little girl took the situation in hand.

There is no bond of understanding between patient and nurse, between the ill and the strong who have watched the approach of death together even though its attack be directed at only one of them which thereafter gives them a universal language. Without much difficulty Lucille made out from the child that the old woman came from a chief greater than her father who lived in a village not far distant; that the wonder of her curative ability had reached his ears and he earnestly prayed the white woman be loaned his own wife for a nurse, that she might be cured of an illness which seemed certain to be fatal.

Lucille saw from the glum expression on the old chief's face that, even though it might bring him into trouble with his neighbor chief, he was more than loath to part with her. She also saw that the child, with the remembrance of her own illness fresh upon her, had allowed her heart to go out to the wife in such sympathy that she had persuaded her father to permit the loaning. Her heart gave a great throb of delight at this unexpected answer to her prayer. She had known there would be trouble getting away just as she had determined that she must leave. There was no possible chance of regaining civilization from here. There might be no chance in another place but there was hope and, while it was meagre sustenance, anything was better than the strain of knowing impossibility. Anything appealed to her so long as it embraced a change, for change spelt renewed hope. Then, too, Hugo Loubeque would be temporarily at least thrown off the trail.

In an hour she had mounted the chief's own horse, her very soul rejoicing at the familiar feel of an easy canter. Beside her rode the old woman, mumbling continually to herself as though she were keeping track of the devious turns in the wilderness of vegetation through which their way led.

Now and then there would be long stretches where Lucille could let her animal out and she took advantage of them all, laughing exultantly at the tingle of the breeze against her cheek. Every stride was a step further away from the place where she had thought herself a prisoner; every stride was a stride nearer hope; any hope meant civilization and civilization meant delivery of the papers to those who would see that they cleared the name of her sweetheart.

Her sweetheart! Her sweetheart! The soft pad of the horse's hoofs seemed to turn into a refrain of never varying sweetness, a refrain that embraced the two words. Hugo Loubeque was embroiled back in the jungles, planning, plotting his next move while his quarry was riding far, far away from him.

She could not even feel the menace of his presence now. The very motion of the beast lulled every other sense to sleep save one of dreamy contentment. Her predicament, as one upon this savage land, did not occur to her. Before she had been terrified to think of it but now she accepted it as an inevitable thing, using all her mental energy figuring on escape, on that which lay in the future and casting the past behind her.

Once she was conscious of a vague feeling of mistrust as she looked back at the squat figure of the old woman, ambling along stolidly as some leathen idol, only her rat-like eyes omitting flashes of fire from between the layers of wrinkled, brown, drooping lids. She cast it away from her as merely a natural feeling, coming so closely as this sense of freedom did upon the depressing environment she was leaving behind.

Faster, faster she urged her horse as she saw a clear stretch of trail opening before her. She was going away—away—was getting clear of the village where she might have been held forever. She still carried the precious papers about her neck despite every effort the international spy had made to steal them. She had foiled him, had taken them from him and had managed to hold them against all odds. And now she was clear of all this.

She was clear of all danger from him. Far behind her, his crafty, unscrupulous brain was mapping out fresh plans of action against a victim who was not where he could locate her. And the pad of the horse's hoofs beat out a gentle rhythm that blended into her joyous mood so wonderfully she could scarcely contain herself.

Faster, faster she urged the horse, her hand continually reaching up and feeling the precious burden about her neck, while her laughter rang out against the jungle that hedged the trail in with an eerie, alien freshness that seemed to make it more silly than ever. Then she looked back for her escort, looked back, still laughing, when the ground seemed to grow soft, to slip up from under her mount's hoofs, and send her hurtling down—down—down—she knew not where nor why—down into blackness at which her hands clutched vainly, clutching nothing from the dark—down into a blackness that seemed stifling her, until it reached up and mercifully compassed her consciousness.

CHAPTER XVI.

Loubeque Overlooks One Detail.

HUGO LOUBEQUE curtly dismissed the withered crone who handed him the sack containing the documents Lucille had worn about her neck. In his eyes glowed no light of triumph. First they had lighted with a strange relief. But now they seemed fastened upon a memory, filled with vague regret, as he visualized the girl, lying helpless at the bottom of the pit he had caused his native to dig across the trail she must pass in answering the fictitious messages he had arranged for the old woman to carry.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet, once more the man of action. Pity this girl, daughter of the woman he loved, he might, but she was not the sort to lie supine while he made away with the papers for which she had gone through so much already. Suddenly he tore open the bag, dumping the contents out before him and running through them nervously. When he looked up, the light of disappointment, almost fear was upon his face.

The amulet, the sacred amulet which had served her so well, would continue to serve her so well as long as she continued in this land, was still in her possession. He had failed to tell the crone to steal that also. And the old woman had reported that she was merely stumped. The sacred amulet which would make her revered by any savage she chanced to meet was still hers while he, Hugo Loubeque, would find every hand against him.

The odds had scarcely lengthened despite the fact that the papers were once more in his possession.

He moved swiftly now, preparing for his long journey through the jungle, away from her restless pursuit and toward possible relief. For, so long as he remained here, Lucille had every one for friend and assistant while he had only those he might gain through fear.

(Continued Next Week.)